

THE INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

Washington, D. C.

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INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

STUDIES IN ADMINISTRATION

THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN ADMINISTRATION

Report of a Survey made at the request
of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary
of the Interior, and submitted to him,
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from crowds, a close observation of home life, and in many instances personal affection. Through special arrangement some extend their outing throughout the year in order to attend the public school. Then, too, they have a friend to whom they can turn, in the supervising matron, with whom their relations seem in most cases to be cordial. Nevertheless, the Indian Service in effect regards the experience as an apprenticeship. The girls work for wages, mostly under city conditions; they are in demand with families whose regular maids want to go home or to do something more profitable during the summer; the work in practice often leads to a permanent job on leaving school. So far as any implicit intention can be perceived it is the fitting of Indian girls for domestic service, the one occupation where there is always a demand for labor because of the social stigma popularly attached to it.

The system is conducted under very rigid rules and in its operation suggests the parole system of a correctional institution. It is not surprising that an Indian who has seen something of the present system characterizes it as a kind of peonage which the children must undergo. "As food appropriations at the school get short they think they must turn the children out," he says.

Few efforts have been made to establish working connections between the boarding schools and the homes of the students. One of the schools has devised a plan for sending out small circulating libraries to Indian villages, each in the charge of a graduate, and has collected some very good material for this purpose. Another employs a field worker whose task it is to study home conditions in order that the school may make its instruction more suitable to the needs of the people and may hold the students in the school for a longer period. This institution plans next year to send a health wagon out into the hill communities from which the girls come. Occasionally a little Four-H club work is found in a boarding school, but this can hardly thrive without closer connections with homes than exists in most of the schools at present. It would be a definite improvement if the present outing system were superseded by another plan for keeping the students in touch with the outside world, a part of which should be a field service to the communities from which the children come.

Community Life. Among many tribes and in many localities a striking lack of development of community life for useful ends is apparent. Organized activities of native origin tend to disappear, while little has been borrowed from white civilization. In a healthy society changes of structure are always going on to meet changed conditions of life. But among the Indians, living as they do under a system of control imposed from the outside, the old social structure tends to die instead of undergoing adaptation to new conditions of existence.

Forms of Community Organization Among Indians. Forms of organized activity that are either indigenous or closely in harmony with primitive forms are clan organization, secret societies, the tribal council, and the Indian court. No less important in the lives of the people are the native ceremonies, such as celebrations, dances, games, and races. These forms of organization tend to disappear under the general influence of white culture, or to take on the form of a spectacle and become commercialized, thus losing much of their original significance in group life.

Forms of organization introduced by whites are churches and schools, clubs for women and children, and farm organizations including both men and women. These new organizations are not characteristic of all Indian communities, and, with the exception of the schools, reach a comparatively small number of the whole Indian population. A specialized activity apparently adopted from pioneer whites is the camp meeting, which still flourishes in eastern Oklahoma. Probably the camp feature is responsible for its popularity with the Five Civilized Tribes.

Other church organizations with features adapted from the whites exist in some sections. The "Shakers" of the Northwest have crosses and candles and a noisy ritual to the accompaniment of hand bells and violent motion, all of which they use in their attempts to heal the sick. They are successors to the medicine men and are no less obstructive to health work. In some parts of the south and east of the Indian country, the Peyote Church flourishes. The Indians assemble for meetings in churches, so-called, where they fall into trance-like stupor from the use of peyote. The organization is of no practical value to the community, and peyote addiction is probably harmful physically as well as socially. The Shakers and the Peyote Church are both reported to be growing.

Recreational Activities Most Indians seem to cling longest to the recreational features of primitive group life and to appreciate recreational before other features of white community life. They cling to their dances and games long after they have abandoned distinctive Indian ways of dressing and living. They love celebrations and fairs and races, and in some places make Christmas, Easter, Decoration Day, Fourth of July, and other holidays of the whites occasions for going into camp and celebrating in their own way for a week or two at a time. They appreciate various forms of recreation originated by whites. A field matron reports from the southwest, of the Indians near a city

The Indians do not lack for amusement. They attend all the "Fiestas," Carnivals, Circuses, Holiday Celebrations and Movies. Very few work Saturday afternoon, spending the half day in town, and usually having a dance in the village Saturday and Sunday evenings.

The government policy seems to have been repressive to native recreational activities. Many officers have been keenly sensible of the economic loss involved in the neglect of animals and crops while Indians gather in camp far from home. Gambling is a part of most games and contests. Dancing is often so intense and protracted as to be injurious to the health. It is often accompanied by the giving of presents. A Red Cross nurse in the Sioux country described the abuse of the custom of giving under the intense emotional strain of the dance:

I suppose that it amounted to a community rite in the old days. Now the idealism is often prostituted by those who see an opportunity for personal gain as the giving goes to individuals. Thus the clever get the money, horses, blankets, shawls, beadwork, etc., by singing a song in praise of those who have the goods. The dance goes with the song in their honor. This giving will go the limit if allowed and families return home destitute.

The same nurse describes a fair as follows

I have dozens of ideas about the next fair but my main idea is a fond hope that there won't be one. The fair is managed by the Indians and it is Indian all right. The idea sounds well. It would seem a good educational opportunity. Being managed by the Indians it descends to feasting, dancing and roping contests with a

ball game, bucking bronchos, and poor horse racing. Accidents, acute gastritis and infant diarrhea with a funeral or two and a *spring crop of illegitimate babies* are the concomitants. As this is one of six of the same variety between June 1st and October 1st the educational value becomes questionable. The exhibit of work was small and creditable but little interest was developed.

Missionary influence has been for the most part directed toward the suppression of dances and similar celebrations, either because they are pagan rites or because dancing is not an approved form of amusement in some denominations, or on account of the various harmful consequences of these events.

In some cases no doubt the judgment of officers and other whites with reference to the Indians' ways of amusing themselves has been biased by race prejudice. There is a touch of complacency regarding white institutions and a lack of respect for those of the Indians. Many have not the sympathetic understanding of the Red Cross nurse, who commented further upon the dancing she saw:

All those interested in bringing the Indian into any degree of economic prosperity are bound to see the extremely deleterious effects of unbridled Indian dancing. On the other hand there is no reason why we should sacrifice in toto their idealism, their art and the good of their ancient religion to our ideas of economic prosperity. One certainly cannot hold that our dancing presents a more socially valuable idea even though not economically demoralizing. At its worst ours is as destructive to our social structure as Indian dancing, and these Indians know it. My present opinion is that it would be of more value to limit the amount of "give away" with dancing than to try to forbid the dance.

A similar attitude was apparent in the comments of a Red Cross nurse among the Cheyennes:

We went to the Indian Christmas tree together. The tent resembles a circus tent inside except for the unique arrangement of the rough logs. At the entrance is a tall pine absolutely bare at which we were a bit disappointed until we saw that each family put their gifts to another family on the tree in their turn, to the tune of the big drum in the center. Nine men were seated around it, playing it while they sang. The persons receiving the gifts entered the singing and danced in a circle around the tree. The chiefs

sat on a bench facing the tree and the singers. One of the chiefs thanked the members of the tribe who contributed for the feast the next day, appointed the cooks, sang his song of joy and departed, leaving the younger crowd to dance white dances to white music. I must say it was dull, unattractive, and clumsy after the solemn, graceful rhythm of the older Indians. Though there are many evils connected with these dances, in proportion they can be no worse than the examples they have of our own.

To take away from any people their forms of recreation without replacing them by something as good or better is generally a mistake. Certainly in the case of the Indians their pronounced bent toward group recreation might be utilized to some good ends. If many day schools could be established and made local recreation centers for the little neighborhoods they serve educationally, and if recreational features could be introduced generally along with local industrial activities, then the Indians might cease to feel so great an urge to congregate in large bands far from the responsibilities of home.

Economic and Civic Organization. Long excursions in search of native foods and annual migrations to hop or potato fields or to orchards during the season for harvesting these crops have harmful features similar to those connected with recreational and religious celebrations in camp. Such projects as the Five-Year Industrial Program and the Industrial and Better Homes Association which has been recently organized on a northwest reservation, are attempts to "fight fire with fire", to make a community effort so interesting that the people will be content with the adventure of making a living at home. An excellent feature of these plans is the organization of the women into auxiliaries, thus enlisting all adults in the enterprise.

The occasional women's clubs, as well as the Four-H Clubs, are chiefly concerned with the encouragement of work in the homes, but in most communities where they exist they are isolated forms of organization and do not thrive as they might if they were part of a unified program. Indian women as a rule are somewhat backward as club members and are especially shy about assuming the duties of office, but they are easily interested in handicrafts or in games. In some places considerable family interest is manifested in the meetings, and husbands as well as children of all ages drop in as spectators.

A few day schools are developing programs of community work and in some cases give promise of becoming real community centers. In some schools the community activities are recreational and include basket ball and baseball teams or orchestras; in others the art of the people is encouraged and even put to industrial account. Various schools are attempting practical health education programs. In a few localities community bath houses and laundries have been established and are in use.

With the single exception of the Pueblo form of government, the Indian council and the Indian court represent about the only approach to civic life that the Indians have. Neither the council nor the court is to be found everywhere; many Indians have no form of organization. Neither the council nor the court is utilized to any great extent as a means of education for self government. Some superintendents regard these forms of organization half contemptuously, and in some cases seem to consider the council rather a nuisance because it serves as a forum for agitators. The superintendents who do try to use the council and the court have not sufficient help to accomplish very much. With proper assistance these organizations might be utilized in such a way as to diminish rather than to increase the superintendent's load.

Degenerative Tendencies. In the absence of well developed community life degenerative influences have full play. This has been the experience of white communities, and it is to be seen also among the Indians. Wherever wholesome occupational and recreational activities are lacking, ill health, shiftlessness, vice, and delinquency flourish.

Undesirable forms of commercialized recreation get the patronage of the Indians living in the vicinity of towns and cities. The field matrons who work with such Indians report disasters arising from the girls' frequenting dance halls and other cheap amusement places. In a locality where the missionary interfered with the organization of a boys' orchestra because he did not believe in dancing or dance music, the gambling houses flourish, as well as the dope peddlers, and the field matron reports:

Our police duties are oftentimes heartrending. For instance, during the past three days we have had three men stricken down by canned heat and bad liquor, two of whom died frightful deaths.

Out on the reservations, far from the amusements of urban life, the Indians find in their periodic camp life a refuge from monotony. The excesses of the dance and other diversions of camp life are undoubtedly due partly to the fact that the people have a poverty of interest in the dull round of existence in the communities where they live.

In some places the Indians seem to have lost both the form and the memory of their own native political organization. The superintendent who organized the Industrial and Better Homes Association found that those Indians had to be taught how to vote on the merits of a question. At first all voted in the affirmative. An old woman at one of the first meetings made a speech in which she explained that the young men did not know how to speak; that her tribe had lost the art because it was so long since they had had any occasion for public speaking.

In tribes that still have merely a form of organization functioning ineffectually, the agitator is influential because among his followers there is much idleness and chronic discontent instead of activity and a well developed public opinion. In a community functioning healthily some agitators would be leaders of real worth and others would have scant followings.

Standards of living tend to seek a lower level in the absence of wholesome community activity. The economic level in a community depends not only upon natural resources but also upon the degree to which economic ideals of life develop within the group. The deadly uniformity to be found in home conditions in many places exists not only because of poverty but also because the people lack economic leadership and do not know how to obtain results through cooperative effort.

The Community the Smallest Unit for Effective Work. Up to the present the government has attacked the Indian problem almost exclusively by the method of standardized routine treatment of individuals. Family work has been for the most part nominal. Community effort has been inadequately financed and staffed and not sufficiently inclusive of all the elements in the community and all departments of welfare to constitute more than the illustration of a promising method. The regulation of the affairs of adults has in large measure failed to develop independence of character or soundness of business judgment. The government school system

has been as disintegrating to the community as to the family. The school routine has interfered with the development of leadership and the ability to carry out cooperative enterprises, since the children have had little participation in organization for work or play. After many years of effort and the expenditure of much money the Indians still constitute a problem. The Indians themselves are more generally blamed than the method to which they have been subjected.

The experience of the white race is that progress is a group process rather than an individual process. Just as individuals usually fail to develop far beyond the level of their families, so family development is limited by the standards of the society in which the families live. Good homes do not flourish under subnormal community conditions, nor do many children develop initiative and responsibility in a general atmosphere of shiftlessness.

Backward communities are sick communities which need diagnosis and treatment. Each one has its own peculiar difficulties, and therefore no set program can be devised and applied mechanically like a patent medicine. Community conditions like family conditions need careful study by experts in that field. In order to change bad conditions skilled leadership from outside the community is usually necessary, but the purpose of such leaders is to develop their successors from within the community so that the group may become self sufficing.

Experience in White Communities Applicable. The methods worked out in dealing with backward white communities should be applied among the Indians. The community should be made the unit of attack, and every family and individual should be included in the study of community conditions and in the resulting plan of treatment. Many reservations include several distinct communities and each should have its organization. In organizing activities the Indians should have a voice. Programs should not be imposed on them, even if they start with their sanction and cooperation should prove slow. Wherever their cooperation is sought their interest in the enterprise is deeper, but still more important, they sometimes save outsiders from fatal mistakes such as that of ignoring lines of social cleavage among them.

Utilization of Indian Activities. What is left of the Indians' primitive community activities should be studied and utilized as far

as possible for constructive ends. Such an approach to organization is tactical as well as sound. The Indian court and the Indian council could be made powerful means for creating public opinion instead of mere forms of congregate activity tolerated by the officers.

Harmful forms of recreation should be eliminated by a process of substitution rather than by direct prohibition. Some Indian dances and games could profitably be retained. A superior feature of some of them lies in the fact that everyone participates, whereas nearly all our games and dances are limited on age or sex lines. A significant thing in the experience of the American Red Cross nurses among the Indians was the demand for recreation and the willingness to try new forms as well as to revive Indian sports. At various points in the Service games, especially of a contest nature, athletic events, circulating libraries, musical organizations, dramatics, parties of various kinds, clubs with social features, and story hours have been tried with success.

Specific Training for Future Citizenship Among Whites. As a specific preparation for release from tutelage Indians should be trained in health, recreational, economic, and civic activities. Group participation in these things is a definite part of the education Indians need if they are ever to have a share in the common life of the American people. Even in sparse rural populations American whites have a degree of control over their own local government and the organization of their economic interests far beyond that of most Indians. The fundamentals of group participation can be learned by the Indians more effectively in their natural environment than after they have scattered into the larger white communities where they may encounter the barriers of race prejudice.

Economy of Organizing Communities. As an administrative device community organization would in the long run prove economical. The Indian Office exists in order to eliminate the need for its own existence. Once the Indians can take care of themselves this branch of the government service may be discontinued. The present policy of consolidating reservations in the interests of economy, even though the Indians are thereby neglected, is not true economy. But if through organization of the Indians native leaders could be developed and community responsibility could be created, then government officers could gradually withdraw supervision without causing hardship and suffering.

Even from the point of view of the local superintendent alone sound community organization in the long run would mean economical administration. The development of native leadership in sympathy with the superintendent's aims would create many centers of influence outside the office. Many government policies could be more effectively interpreted by native leaders than by government officers, because the more backward Indians are much more sensitive to the public opinion of their own people than to that of whites. Government prestige would not suffer from native promulgation of policies. Real prestige depends upon the personal qualities of the superintendent and his assistants and is found only where real leadership exists.

Type of Organization Desirable. All field workers should be engaged in the organization of community forces, and all community work of a reservation should center in the office of the superintendent. Health, industry, and the schools should all be represented by community programs, each of which should be worked out with reference to the unified effort of all. In some localities a recreation program might be carried out through the schools without a specialized employee; in others where the recreational resources of the people are few and vice and delinquency thrive, a recreation worker of experience should be employed.

In the development of a recreation program under a trained leader the worker should be employed before a community house is established. Experience in white communities has shown that trained personnel is much more important to success in this field than elaborate equipment. Many community houses and much equipment have stood idle or have been used fitfully and without perceptible good results because of the absence of responsible leadership. Even the Indian Service is not without its examples of this mistake. Money spent on a community house or a recreation center in advance of a program and workers to carry it into effect is a waste of funds.

A trained worker should precede any definite program of recreation. A good working program in the field of recreation is difficult to evolve and depends upon the insight and understanding of a good leader. Like any other satisfactory program it must be preceded by a study of local needs. The competent leader in an Indian